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the eye

Race still matters.

inside, five different student perspectives

compiled by Oriana Magnera

kicking ass '80s style \\\ guster's ryan miller on the last 13 years \\\ hat tricks

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RACE MATTERS

compiled by Oriana Magnera
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

A certain awesome Illinois senator may not move into the White House until January, but I'm convinced that the age of anti-cynicism—the earnest new epoch trumpeted by Obama, whose rhetoric of hope has ridden into the American discourse on a unicorn, trailing sparkles and bearing cupcakes for anyone who asks—has already hit. On the founder of Vice magazine's Web site titled "Street Carnage," a blogger whose handle I won't repeat posted a lengthy resignation titled "Obama Victory Renders Hipster 'Movement' Obsolete." Maybe the transformation isn't complete—that same post features a few too many instances of the c-word for me to feel comfortable totally endorsing it. But it's grown increasingly clear to me over the last week or so that the other c-word, the one thrown around so much in Obama's campaign, *change*, wasn't an empty signifier. We really are more hopeful.

If you need more proof, look no further than the Internet sensation du jour. You've probably heard by now of a Web site called Puppy Cam, featuring a live feed from San Francisco of a litter of Shiba Inu puppies playing with toys, wrestling each other, and—perhaps most adorably!—sleeping. It's spawned tons of adoring blogs to post "awww" entries, including those of *Time* and MSNBC; a Twitter page

with periodic updates on the six dogs' activities; and lots of wasted hours from people who should be working. (Me included.) This, in an Obama era, is what constitutes a viral video.

And think of how different it is from the Internet sensation of about a year ago: 2 Girls 1 Cup. Disgusting, debasing acts uploaded solely for the shock value? Forget it—that's for people who aren't happy to be alive. Now that I'm actually hopeful for the future, show me a puppy kicking around a stuffed jack-o'-lantern.

This is the kind of viral video that I think is designed to appeal to people like me anyway, though—I never watched 2 Girls 1 Cup, but I've long made a habit of looking at cute animals online as a pick-me-up. I'm not very good at hiding it—it's common enough knowledge that sometimes my friends or boyfriend will send along a photo of a particularly inquisitive puppy, or two otters holding paws, if they know I've had a bad day. (I've heard that looking at adorable stuff online activates the same pleasure centers in the brain as looking at porn online, which I choose not to imbue with any significance.) But now—now it's a phenomenon! It's something we're talking about! Can we watch puppies nip and squeak and run in their sleep? Yes, we can!

—Alexandria Symonds

This Is England

TEXT AND PHOTO BY ALISON BUMKE

Someone must have thought the Isis was too idyllic to be disturbed and decided to make it impossible to find. A beautiful stretch of the River Thames bordered by expansive meadows, wading geese and swans, and colorful houseboats, it's where I go for rowing practice several times a week—yet I still manage to get lost. I'm starting to think that Oxford roads are less reliable than Hogwarts staircases. After winding down Magpie Lane, you'll reach a street you've never seen before, even though you've supposedly used this route in the past. Once on my way to practice, locked gates forced me to approach the river from a winding side route. When I finally reached a bridge signaling I had gone too far, I came to a sign identifying it as Folly Bridge.

I did make it to practice but was still a little shocked to find myself rowing at all. The last time I played a team sport—soccer—was in middle school. I'm a musician and a journalist who feels exceedingly sporty after an intense yoga session. But there was something irresistible about getting involved. Oxford and Cambridge are at the center of the rowing world, competing in an annual spring race that is more climactic than even Olympic rowing competitions (partly because of the legendary night of drinking that always follows). Also, let's face it—rowing for Oxford just seemed so quintessentially British.

The first practice session was in the “tank,” which sounded ominous. In an e-mail response to my urgent inquiry about what to wear, the coach said I'd need “tracksuit bottoms, a t-shirt/vest top, and trainers.” Great—now I needed a translator, too.

It turns out that the tank is a pool with a wooden

structure similar to the inside of a rowing boat. Despite my failure to understand the coach—with his thick accent bouncing off the cement walls, he might as well have been asking us to do cartwheels—I slowly got the hang of the basic rowing motion. There was something deeply satisfying about it, even on that first day.

The real fun started the following week, once we ventured out in actual boats. As soon as we hit the water, I fell head-over-heels in love. It was so peaceful as we glided along, rowing steadily as waves lapped gently against the side of the boat (I even started to understand the commands of our cox, or navigator, so that when she'd yell, “Stern four, backstops, GO!” I wouldn't think she'd gone entirely loopy).

Training is intensifying as we prepare for Christ Church Regatta, a race at the end of November (which has been rained out the past two years, offering a clue to what our weather can be like here). Teddy Hall's women have won the annual Head of the River competition for the past three years, and at a formal hall celebrating the team's most recent win, the eight rowers we toasted (with port!) were an impressive bunch—one had just swum the English Channel, another rowed for Great Britain in the Beijing Olympics with several other Teddy students, and another was about to embark on a 3,000-mile, three-month trek in a rowing boat departing from Australia. Their accomplishments increased my appreciation for our coach, who had seemed a bit intense—I guess he's just trying to weed out the wimps who might not make it to London's 2012 games.

Next week, we'll receive our official crew assignments for the regatta. Given our coach's toughness, I was pleased when he told me recently I'd done very well in the “tub,” a two-person boat. Big praise for the musician in tracksuit bottoms. ■



COMPILED BY HILLARY BUSIS
AND RAPHAEL POPE-SUSSMAN

Editors' 10

what we're into this week

1. The “country of Africa”: “I greatly enjoyed the post-election news coverage of how (anonymously quoted, of course) McCain staffers were outraged by Palin and her antics, especially that she didn't know Africa is, in fact, a continent and not a country. Even if Palin now denies the story, it's still hilarious.”

—Tom Faure, *Spectator* editor-in-chief

2. Cole Mohr: “The model in the Marc by Marc Jacobs ads. You know, the guy wearing the dresses. I can't get enough of his unique features and fresh look.”

—Helen Werbe, *production* editor

3. Sierra Mist Free Cranberry Splash: “Regular Sierra Mist is pretty gross, but every winter they release an actually palatable variant that tastes like something besides sugar-water. It's legit refreshing and is a perfect mixer to boot!”

—Alexandria Symonds, *editor-in-chief*

4. Helmets: “They may look strange, but I crashed on my bike going about 20 miles per hour down a hill the other day—if I didn't have my helmet on, I'd probably still be in the hospital.”

—Shane Ferro, *food* editor

5. Nutritional yeast: “Delicious and lives up to its name. Apparently it's a full protein, low in fat, and full of B-12—perfect for vegetarians and vegans.”

—Jennie Rose Halperin, *music* editor

6. Excel spreadsheets: “They make planning for spring semester so much easier! I wouldn't mind it if the program was a little easier to manipulate, though. Don't you hate having to drag the columns manually?”

—Laura Torre, *production* editor

7. Brothers and Sisters: “Lots of characters makes for juicy plot lines and a smart domestic drama. It's the perfect antidote to the Sunday-night blues.”

—Laura Hedli, *theater* editor

8. Furry moccasins: “Finally, it's cold enough that I can go outside wearing what are essentially slippers without worrying about attracting stares.”

—Hillary Busis, *deputy features* editor

9. Oxford's list of the 10 most irritating expressions: “In descending order: ‘At the end of the day,’ ‘fairly unique,’ ‘I personally,’ ‘at this moment in time,’ ‘with all due respect,’ ‘absolutely,’ ‘it's a nightmare,’ ‘shouldn't of,’ ‘24/7,’ ‘it's not rocket science.’ Now the challenge: put them together in one grammatically correct sentence (less the hopeless ‘shouldn't of’).”

—Rebecca Evans, *managing arts* editor

10. Politico 44: “For those of you who, like me, are suffering from serious election coverage withdrawal (symptoms include endlessly refreshing the Huffington Post), check out this Politico sister-site that promises to cover the Obama presidency ‘minute by minute.’ Obama won't be president for two more months, but the site already updates constantly, and I'm already hopelessly addicted.”

—Thomas Rhiel, *production* editor

It’s in the Bag

when charity and celebrity collide

BY GISELLE LEON
PHOTO COURTESY OF WHOLE FOODS

“Almost 400 million children around the world go to bed hungry every night,” FEEDprojects.org states. That’s why Lauren Bush—sister of Ashley Bush, BC ’11—started FEED Projects, an organization that works to help solve the children’s hunger crisis, for the U.N.’s World Food Program in 2006. A Princeton graduate and seasoned WFP spokes-woman, Lauren regularly went on mission trips to underprivileged schools abroad—but she felt that she could do more. Ashley, who went on a trip with Lauren to Honduras, explains: “When you go to the sites, you’re in schools for like 20 minutes at a time, handing out food really quickly, being driven an hour in between each school. ... It’s not like you’re making a big difference.”

Lauren already had roots in the fashion world. She models for Ralph Lauren and dates David Lauren, the designer’s son. She decided to design a bag and donate the revenue from its sales to WFP. The bags that have been sold on Amazon.com, in Whole Foods and, more recently, in the RL Rugby store. Ashley says that the WFP was understandably hesitant at first: “It’s a big organization and this girl out of college was like, ‘I want to do a bag for you!’” Ashley does admit that the family name—yes, they’re related to the Bushes—and Lauren’s celebrity helped her idea get picked up by companies.

Ashley decided to bring this global concern to campus through the FEED club, an organization that she founded under the Student Governing Board, which works to end hunger on both a worldwide and local level.

“We’re really about raising awareness about hunger with focus on our community. We’re going to local soup kitchens, going to low-income housing, and helping out. But we’re also conscious of the international crisis, and we fund-raise at events for that,” Ashley says.

The club is holding an event on Nov. 21 called the “Hunger Banquet,” which is meant to be a microcosm of worldwide hunger disparities: while some people eat well, millions more starve every day. At the event, a few people will sit at tables eating hearty meals, while the rest of the crowd will sit on the floor with barely any food at all. Jeffrey Sachs will also be speaking at the banquet.

At the club’s general body meeting on Oct. 27, Ashley announced the news to club members, who immediately began planning and pitching ideas regarding the banquet’s logistics. The enthusiasm displayed at the meeting spoke to the fact that club members are passionate about what they’re doing. “This hunger problem is a really worthy and serious cause. How could you not care?” says Clay Bartlett, CC ’11, FEED’s international service chair.

Because FEED is a new organization, it has to share its budget with Feel Good CU, another service group focused on the issue of hunger, until it proves that it can work independently.

“It’s definitely hard to not have that much funding,” Ashley says. “Because then we can’t really do that many events, which essentially helps get the word out.”

This is one reason Ashley is excited about a new FEED bag that Lauren has made for RL Rugby: part of the revenue the bags generate will go to campus FEED organizations.

So do members of FEED care that Ashley attends the weekly FEED meetings, or do they just want to help the hungry? The evidence points toward the latter. The club’s meeting on Oct. 27 was energetic, with students giving input about the Hunger Banquet and whether FEED’s Thanks-giving fund-raising should be directed locally or back to WFP. Of the 16 students there, 13 spoke up at least once. Bartlett attributes this to the zest for activism that characterizes Columbia’s students: “It’s a testament to the Columbia vibe. People can be free around here and not be in a spotlight. She was born into this family, but she’s doing something on her own with her own agenda,” he says. “When she wakes up in the morning, she’s just



Lauren Bush helps battle hunger with a fashionable tote. Her sister Ashley continues the fight on campus.

Ashley, not Ashley Bush. She’s just doing something for a great cause, and without her leadership this club couldn’t exist.”

Ashley feels that the family name has had very different effects for Lauren and herself in terms of how their cause has motivated others. “I don’t think people would come to the club for an hour every Monday just to be in the presence of me,” she says. “I don’t promote ‘Ashley Bush for FEED!’ But, for Lauren, using the name has helped her get the bag out there.”

Then again, maybe it just takes more than a well-known surname to get Columbia students to take notice—even if we pretend that we’re too sophisticated to get star struck. “Blake Lively was on campus, and the rest of Gossip Girl,” Bartlett says. “And, James Franco! I mean he has to be 100,000 times more famous than Ashley. Not in a negative way. But, he’s James Franco. It’s just not a big deal.” ●

New Morning in America

BY RAPHAEL POPE–SUSSMAN
PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA

This is it.

This will be my last gasp of political commentary of the year. When we return to Columbia in January, Barack Obama will be our president, and I may or may not be serving as the humor editor of *The Eye*.

And so, I wanted to take one long, lusty look back at a campaign that changed America—its heart, its soul, and its diapers—irrevocably.

After 254 years, America finally sacked up and elected a president with a Columbia degree. No more must this august Ivy League institution suffer in virtual anonymity, while Harvard and Yale dance under the Klieg lights.

It’s a great step forward for Columbia, and also

for the millions of Americans who believe in equal opportunities for all eight Ivy League schools.

Did you know that James A. Garfield attended something called Hiram College? What is that?

Seriously, people. It’s simply disgraceful that a country claiming to be the land of milk and honey with opportunity-lined streets of gold let a graduate from Kinderhook Academy high school into the White House before ever allowing a Columbia alum the same privilege. It’s true. According to a Web site called Notable Names Database, President Martin Van Buren graduated from Kinderhook Academy in 1796. This site also notes many more disturbing details about Van Buren, such as the fact that his “risk factors” included “obesity, gout, and asthma.”

Obama’s improbable path to the presidency was a tremendous source of inspiration to many in his father’s ancestral home of Kenya. The Obamas belong to the Luo tribe, which has long

suffered discrimination at the hands of the dominant Kikuyu. Obama’s political successes have inspired a saying in Kenya—that “the United States will have a Luo president before Kenya does.”

Those are powerful words. And they remind me of an old American folk saying: “America will elect a corpulent, asthmatic, gout-ridden Kinderhook alumnus before it elects a Columbian.”

Oh, what wisdom the old folk-sayers of America possessed. Certainly, this nation has had much tumult in its history. But on Tuesday night, we turned to a new chapter.

Yes, this election has changed America forever. Only a few days ago, thousands of the brightest, preppiest, and most well-connected young men and women at hardscrabble colleges like Dartmouth or Penn could never have dreamed of becoming president of the United States. If they were lucky, they’d have the chance to polish the president’s boots, scrub his toilet, or serve on the National Security Council. But no longer. And that’s the American dream. ●



Martin Van Buren, Kinterhook Class of ’96: Best Smile.

Ch–ch–changes

This week, *The Eye*’s lead story examines the issues of race and ethnicity at Columbia through five students’ personal experiences. For reference, here’s a collapsed timeline of racially charged incidents at the University over the past 40 years, compiled by Oriana Magnera.

1968: Students protest the construction of a new gymnasium over Morningside Park that would have separate entrances for Morningside Heights residents and Columbia students. White protestors are asked by black protestors to take over their own building.

1992: Students protest the Eurocentric nature of the Core and call for a newer, more global set of requirements. The Core is changed to incorporate new requirements that were, until recently, known as the Major Cultures component.

1996: Students go on a hunger strike for the creation and funding of an ethnic studies department.

1999: The Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race is established.

2005: An ad-hoc committee is established to review the department of Middle East and Asian languages and cultures after students complain of intimidation and anti-Israeli bias in classroom discussions.

Spring, 2006: Two students vandalize a Ruggles suite, drawing swastikas on the walls and writing racist and anti-Semitic slurs; homophobic graffiti is found on an RA’s door. In response to both incidents, a group of students organize as Stop Hate on Columbia’s Campus and hold silent protests on the Low steps.

Fall, 2006: Jim Gilchrist is invited to campus by the Columbia University College Republicans. To protest his appearance, a group of students rush the stage.

Fall, 2007: Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is invited to speak on campus. His appearance sparks concerns about both anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim sentiment on campus, already stirred by the tenure reviews of professors Nadia Abu El-Haj and Joseph Massad. Racial slurs are found graffitied in a SIPA bathroom. A noose is found on the door of Teachers College professor Madonna Constantine, and the incident is deemed a hate crime. Anti-Semitic graffiti is found in a Lewisohn bathroom. In protest of the recent bias incidents, Manhattanville expansion, decades-long tensions surrounding recognition of CSER, and the Major Cultures requirement, six students hunger-strike—the University agrees to some of the demands, most notably a reorganization of the Core.

December, 2007: The New York City Council approves the University’s plan for a \$7 billion expansion into the Manhattanville neighborhood—students and residents protest what they perceive as inevitable “gentrification” and the displacement of neighborhood residents.

Fall, 2008: The Office of the Core unveils new Major Cultures requirements, now renamed the Global Core Requirement, which include a focus on issues of transnationalism, race, and ethnicity. CSER unveils a new, more structured curriculum, a Native American Studies major, and begins a student-led hiring process. Barack Obama, CC ’83, is elected the first African-American president and is the first Columbia graduate to reach the Oval Office.

A Saturday Night On 4th Floor Of Butler In Perspective

BY AKIVA BAMBERGER

3 number of seats left

2 number of giggling people I imagine strangling as I continue doing homework

10 number of farts I expel—silent and deadly—over the course of 30 minutes

4 number of sad, long hours I have left here for the night

Things To Do Now That The Election Is Over:

● finish all episodes of *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia*

● stop yelling

● discuss Proposition 8

● discuss Propositions 1–7

● watch *Legally Blonde* to learn how best to pursue career in politics

Sketching the Stars

melanie jones interviews susan hilferty

BY MELANIE JONES

PHOTO COURTESY OF JOAN MARCUS

Susan Hilferty has worked in costume and set design for over 300 theater productions, including *Wicked*, *Spring Awakening*, *Lestat*, *Assassins*, and *Into the Woods*, as well as for opera and film. As chair of the department of design for stage and film at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, Hilferty balances academics with her continued stage work, which has earned her a Tony, multiple Tony nominations, and a 2000 OBIE for Sustained Excellence in Design. Melanie Jones sat down with Hilferty to talk about creating worlds, sticking with her initial inspiration, and why she's the luckiest person she knows.

You've worked in theater, opera, dance, and film. Do you have a different way of approaching each?
I guess it would be the same thing if you were speaking to an artist about an idea. You begin the same way, even if it's going to be a sculpture or oil

painting or watercolor. ... You move backwards and try to focus on your initial impulse. It's that impulse, the embers, where you begin, and that always has to do with the text as compared to those specifics of the medium.

If one of your ideas gets rejected, how do you step back and say "this isn't personal" when you're so involved?

One of the things you learn early on is how to have an idea be personal, but personal in relation to the text. ... Every time you work on a production, whether or not it's the actor, or the space, or you think it's a great idea but it doesn't work with the rest of the ideas, you're constantly having to stay fluid. [You're] wanting to return to that idea and protect that, not other things that might actually be interfering with it.

Any examples?

In *Wicked* there's one whole number that we just threw the clothes out of. The clothes were wrong, the number was wrong, everything was wrong. Because it wasn't telling the right story, the story we were trying to tell. So out it goes. And they were perfectly lovely clothes—but wrong. If you spend too much time and energy protecting the wrong thing, you're just going to end up with a bad show. Sometimes people will say to me, "The clothes were good, but I didn't like the piece." I think, "That means I didn't do my job." I need to be connected to the whole piece, not be something separate from it.

So you'd prefer someone who didn't enjoy the show but thought your clothes went with it?

Exactly! That would be a compliment, saying they were totally on the money but they just didn't like it. To feel like I wasn't part of it, I feel it would be a mistake for any designer.

Were you always so passionate about design?

That's a really interesting question today, of all days. I just had breakfast with my high school acting teacher. He's in town seeing shows, and I've kept in touch with him since I was in high school. In high school, I was always interested in the arts. ... I did my junior year [of college] in London, and it was great because I realized I had never seen a professional show before. I took a class that got me to go to the theater, and it was like being hit upside the head. ... I started to recognize what I would call the imagination of theater, what you can as a company create.

How much involvement do you have once rehearsals start? Are you making changes throughout that time too?

In the design process you're actually always seeing everything in pieces. You're designing a character, and in your head you constantly have to put

those pieces together: these clothes will be seen in relationship to this set and under these lights. Even though you work on them and you see them in a fitting room or a costume shop, it's only going to make sense once it's on the stage with the actors wearing it in those lights. So you're constantly, during the whole process, trying to imagine it. The critical working time is during tech rehearsal. That's the only time I get to see the whole, so that's the critical time. As soon as the work lights go up, it's not the same anymore. It's literally your window.

IF I WAS GOING TO DO WICKED . . . NOW, I WOULD PROBABLY DO IT COMPLETELY DIFFERENTLY.

How do you balance Tisch with your stage work?

I don't do many dinner parties! I keep thinking I should take advantage of the potentially glamorous lifestyle that I have, but I don't have time. Being a NYU chair is all year long, I have a heavy teaching load, and then I have a full design load. It seems to suit me. I'll stop when someone tells me I'm doing a bad job at either one. I mean, it's work, but I find great joy in both my design work and my teaching, so I'm the luckiest person I know.

Do your students sometimes try to do someone else's "style" instead of their own?

My goal at Tisch is to bring in a group of individual artists and have them leave the program more individual and with a stronger voice than when they came in. ... The greatest tool we can give them is understanding that story that they want to tell, which is different than my story, than my generation's story, than my sex's story. A lot of my philosophy in teaching comes from watching young designers damaged by a bad education, where they have been taught "The Way" to design.

Do you have a "Way"?

I'm constantly having to reinvent myself. That's why it's so thrilling for me to do both *Wicked* and *Spring Awakening*. Both of them equally, I think, are expressive of my inner self, but completely different, radically different, in terms of the way I expressed myself. I felt as connected to both of those forms of storytelling. But if I was going to do *Wicked*, for instance, now I would probably do it completely differently. ●



Tony-winner Susan Hilferty designed the costumes for *Wicked* and *Spring Awakening*.



Race still matters.

Last Tuesday, Columbia students rallied and stormed Broadway—not to protest great injustices but to celebrate the election of the first African-American president (and the first Columbia alumnus to ascend to the White House). But despite his alma mater's exuberance and the incredible excitement that surrounded Barack Obama's appearance on campus with John McCain earlier this fall—his first return to Columbia since his college days—Obama has kept a well-documented silence about his time at this university. Those years only take up a few pages of his memoir, *Dreams From My Father*, but that small section reveals a problem that still persists on campus today. Obama describes “the bile that flowed freely not just out on the streets but in the stalls of Columbia's bathrooms ... where, no matter how many times the administration tried to paint them over, the walls remained scratched with blunt correspondence between niggers and kikes.”

The bias incidents of the past fall—and the past several years—are still fresh in the minds of some students who insist that prejudice and institutional racism on campus must be acknowledged and openly addressed. Even as Columbia students spilled into Harlem to celebrate on Election Night, it was difficult to forget the tension surrounding the University's impending expansion. Columbians can ally themselves in support of common causes and share excitement with their Manhattanville neighbors, but ultimately students can do no more than speak for their own experiences. Obama described the University during his undergraduate time as “just north of gentrification.”

A dialogue about race must account for a variety of experiences and identities in order to make progress against intolerance and inequality, a fact that Columbia must keep in mind as it re-examines its Core.

It would be impossible to capture an accurate portrait of the identities, both personal and shared, that encompass the Columbia campus. Rather than attempt to describe the diverse population of the University, *The Eye* invited several students to define themselves and their place in the greater conversation of this institution. They are by no means representative of any group, nor are they token voices. These students can speak for themselves and no one else.

—Oriana Magnera

photos by Molly Crossin, Kristina Budelis, and Sarah Ann Darro



“To worry about ‘race on campus’ is futile”

By *Fernanda Diaz*

It’s so much easier to write about why race matters than why it doesn’t. Or even why it shouldn’t. Simply whittling down the debate to the specific place where race matters—or doesn’t—is a feat. At home? At school? In the White House? Does it matter if the issue is discussed in socio-political, socio-economic, or just social terms?

I think I have about as much racial awareness now as I did in fourth grade. At that age, as a recent immigrant to the United States and resident of a small town where everyone was either an Italian or a Jew, I hardly dwelled on the issue of my race or ethnicity. I just saw myself as somewhere in between, conscious of the fact that I was from Mexico but unaware of how this made me susceptible to discrimination or prejudice. I certainly didn’t make anyone else’s background an issue and was oblivious to whether others made any about mine.

Then, one day, I came home with big news: I was a minority! Finally, I had been jolted into thinking about my racial identity and had something to grasp onto. To someone who had never made an issue about race, the opportunity to do so

was exciting, much in the same way that learning how to multiply and divide opened up the world to a 9-year-old.

My mom, of course, didn’t find it so amusing that I was being taught about my inferior status in class. “We’re not minorities,” she assured me. “To be a minority, you have to be American first, and then you’re counted as part of the smaller, non-white population. But we’re just visiting. We’re a majority in Mexico, so don’t worry.” I remember it so well because I wasn’t worried, I was fascinated by this new discovery. Soon enough, it was easy to see why my mom thought I was worried instead of relieved.

Of course, I eventually figured out that to be a minority meant I belonged to a group: a group of people for whom minority rights, racial oppression, and even just good old-fashioned racism did matter, and who probably weren’t so overjoyed when they first learned about how they had been officially designated a different status than white America.

Which brings me to today, my senior year in

college, when I admit I’m still like that fourth-grader, who goes through life oblivious of her personal relationship to race and racism. After three and a half years here, I’m not afraid to say that to worry about “race on campus” is futile—to dwell on the supposed alienation on campus is a waste of time, an ineffective allocation of our intellect and passion.

Interestingly enough, as big a deal as I’m making about my racial unconsciousness, it’s actually not how I treat the issue anywhere beyond my individual relationships and decisions. Nor do I advocate that anyone should.

If we let a few morons who want to commit hate crimes define this campus, aren’t we just being inefficient? If the goal is eventually for equality, above all, then shouldn’t we actively strive to treat each other equally instead of stagnating in an endless discussion about how we’re different and mistreated? The real issue is in the much harsher world beyond this school, which is why we should seize the opportunity to foster individual consciousness about why race really shouldn’t matter, here and now.

“I reverted to my usual routine of despondency, anger, and general frustration”

By *Christina Chen*

On the night of Oct. 19, I waited with bated breath for word on whether the assaults that had occurred two days earlier had been racially motivated. Campus Security reported that out of the seven students who had been assaulted, five had been of Asian descent. I think that at that moment I had already resigned myself to my worst fears being confirmed. This would be, I thought, yet another addition to the spate of incidents of anti-Asian violence that had been afflicting our campus and New York City as a whole. I reverted to my usual routine of despondency, anger, and general frustration with my inability to avert this violence—the routine to which I had ascribed in confronting many such incidents that had occurred in the past.

Although these acts are egregious in and of themselves, it has been particularly difficult for those of us who are supporting the victims to discover that they were also incidents of cross-racial violence—violence launched from within and across communities of color. Many of us found this to be a reality that is hard to confront. It’s probably not surprising, then, that much of the discourse that emerged out of these incidents was often charged with non-productive, inflammatory, and sometimes racist undertones. In failing to be critical of the media and the public’s criminalization of urban

youth of color, we did not realize that we had become complicit in the same project of subjugation and racist logic that not only pathologizes black and Latino youth but also impels the racialization of Asian Americans as weak, hyper-effeminate, defenseless, and unwilling to speak out or retaliate—the effects of which can be clearly seen in these attacks. These victims were targeted because they were perceived as being aligned with the stereotypes described above.

When Asian-American students are rushing home in order to avoid being randomly attacked because of their race, stereotypes are not merely irritating misconceptions—they’re powerful notions that manifest themselves with extreme modes of violence, disrupting the security and safety of our everyday lives. By failing to reflect on the flaws of our approaches or diagnose the causes of such problems, we push our communities to become reactive—focusing on the hostilities and anger that are so pervasive after these incidents—rather than proactively preventing their occurrence while building stronger and healthier communities in the process.

For these reasons and many more, I believe that it is now necessary for the Asian-American community—and all communities—to come together and coordinate meaningful collective action, with the intent of radically altering the power structures of our society. We must transform our interactions and relationships with other individuals and seek to demystify traits that have been characterized as threateningly heterogeneous in our societies for centuries. Coalition-building and intergroup-understanding are integral in achieving this mission, and education and engagement are crucial tools with which we must equip ourselves in recognizing, resisting, and critically challenging the social hierarchies of the past.

If we dare to imagine a society in which the underlying humanity of all peoples is embraced and actively promoted, we are surely capable of forging a new kind of a society in which everybody is truly “equal.”



“I’m a legal alien” by *M. Lee**

I’m a foreigner. I’m from the Third World, those “less developed” countries. I say Third World instead of a specific country because I identify with all states whose real GDP per capita falls below a certain threshold. If you’re not from that world, it’s hard to understand what it’s like to be me. I was on Times Square the other day, watching my

American friends revel in the beauty of their functioning democracy, and I felt amused and strangely detached. We don’t really do rights and liberties where I’m from. My government is run by a corrupt elite. We need international observers to legitimize our elections. It’s funny—our constitution is modeled after the American one, so you’d think we’d be closer to the path to democracy with such a shining exemplar to follow. Admittedly, we’ve only had a few decades to practice this form of government, so perhaps we just need a little more time. After all, we’ve had to shrug off centuries of colonial oppression, both social and economic.

I remember an incident overseas when a waiter refused to serve my family because he didn’t think we could afford the meal. This inference came from the fact that we were speaking a Third World language in a classy hotel. The man thought we were entertainers—a hired staff of two 40-year-olds and three young children. It was humiliating. I realized then that economics mattered. Purchasing power is power, period.

Those “more developed” countries enjoy privileges that we cannot gain access to. Your passports buy you entry and deference. You are the tourists in our unspoiled Edens. We value your dollars, euros, and yen. We envy your citizenship, yet we fear its costs. Immigration implies uncertainty and potential loss of cultural identity: language, tradition, and enduring national ties. It happens.

Every time I pass through U.S. customs and immigration, I feel like a second-class citizen, except I’m not even that. I’m a legal alien. We get to stand in the long line for questioning, finger-printing, and picture-taking. I feel guilty for bearing my passport. I’m from the Third World—of course I’m suspect. If I can’t deal with it, then I should just go home. I should leave this place, this America that knows nothing of brownouts and attempted coups—where you can even drink the water straight from the tap. It boggles this Third World mind.

So here I am, drinking tap water and receiving an Ivy League education in the most dynamic city on the planet. My classes are packed with Americans, some not even from New Jersey. Most of my classmates are open-minded and ask insightful questions about international relations and the global economy. Others speak of jungle fever and mud huts in those concrete jungles of Southeast Asia. I grate my teeth and steel myself to defend the Third World. It’s moments like those when I realize that, in spite of how Americanized I’ve become, I’m still very much a foreigner. And that’s fine, because as soon as graduation comes, I’m taking my \$200,000 liberal arts education and returning to my home country—which is exactly what the American government wants me to do.

**name has been changed*



“You ask me where I’m from”

By Amin Ghadimi

You ask me where I’m from.

I am from Japan. I was born in Kobe. I grew up eating sushi and drinking green tea. I feel at home every time the airplane I’m on touches down on that man-made island in Osaka Bay. But I am fingerprinted before I can claim my luggage at the airport. And I am bound by law to carry my Gaikokujin Toroku Shomeisho, my “Certificate of Alien Registration,” with me at all times in the streets of my hometown. Yes, I am from Japan. But no, I am not Japanese.

So you ask me where I’m from.

I am from Canada. I spent a few years in Toronto. I used a little blue book that says CANADA on it to enter the United States. I think I remember the lyrics of my national anthem. But I don’t like hockey, and I don’t say “eh.” And, for some reason, the customs agent always wants to direct me to the “new immigrant” line when I land in Vancouver. Yes, I am from Canada. But no, I am not Canadian.

So you ask me where I’m from.

I am from Iran. I speak Persian and eat Persian food. I have a name that no one can pronounce. I look like I belong in the streets of Tehran. But I’ve never been to Iran. The government decided that it didn’t want me to be Iranian when it put one of my relatives to death because he was a Bahá’í. Yes, I am from Iran. But no, I am not Iranian.

So you ask me where I’m from.

I am from Columbia. I see Japanese questions of identity in the *Odyssey*. I see Canadian stories of foreignness and cultural exclusion in *Medea*. I see Iranian governmental extremism in Herodotus’s *Histories*. And in these questions of nationality and ethnicity I see my Bahá’í faith. I believe that “the earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.” I believe that “it is not for him to pride himself who loveth his country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world.” So in Columbia I see a mirror of myself. I see my heritages—Japanese, Canadian, Iranian—fused together. So you ask me where I’m from.

Now I say: where are you from?

“With a simple sentence, I became racialized”

By Sadia Latifi

“I will never like you as more than a friend because of your race.”

I had heard about other members of my family experiencing discrimination in a post-9/11 America. I heard their airport-security horror stories, and I listened as they shared countless examples of mysteriously languishing friendships and missed employment opportunities.

I never had any of my own stories to share. I didn’t cover my hair, and I didn’t actively practice the religion I was raised with in any visible way. Instead, I immersed myself in a culture of music, clothing, and books that was decidedly American.

In a perverse way, it made me feel left out.

How come no one was discriminating against me? Did I act that “white”?

Mostly, though, I ignored my heritage and continued on a blissful trajectory of the American Dream that kept me far away from cultural group events, which I felt were self-segregating and socially limiting. I had no desire to spend time with girls who wouldn’t talk with boys and spent their weekends learning how to cook biryani for their future husbands.

My mother, fearing my inevitable social collapse, used to suggest making a few desi friends, adding: “No matter how hard you try, you will never be one of them. You will always be different.” I called her ignorant and told her that attending Columbia would situate me among color-blind peers.

When my race finally did catch up to me, it was in the form of a brutal rejection from the mouth of a new friend I had grown increasingly close to—and enamored of.

“I will never like you as more than a friend because of your race.”

With a simple, almost admirably honest sentence, I became racialized. I had spent years preparing myself to be an empathetic journalist, trying to make people I interacted with forget I was anything but just like them. And for what? So that when I met someone I thought I loved, I could be painfully informed that my only shortcoming was the one aspect of myself I could not change.

After taking weeks to get over the initial shock and heartbreak, I was confronted with the reality that, even at a school as progressive as Columbia, there are still people who hold onto racist values and genuinely believe in them. Even in the melting pot of New York City, there are still people who would rather perpetuate backward societal norms. I felt like I had been punched in the stomach. For a long time, I was unable to reconcile the idyllic grand narrative of Columbia I had always imagined and spoken about to others with the reality I ingested.

And when I looked for the support of a friend who would understand my identity crisis, there was no one.

Back to the Past

in a different world, the 1980s action film makes its way back to theaters

BY PETER LABUZA

PHOTO COURTESY OF KAREN BALLARD

At one point in *Casino Royale*, everything goes to hell. Seeing his lover captured, James Bond hops in his Aston Martin and begins to chase after her. But only 30 seconds later, he crashes the car. By the end of the film, he hasn't defeated the villain, he hasn't gotten the girl of his dreams, and he hasn't become the suave, sexy hero. Not exactly the classic action film that we are used to. Tomorrow's release of *Quantum of Solace*, the sequel to *Casino Royale*, follows in a similar tradition. In the latest installment, Bond breaks away from MI6 in order to hunt his lover's killers for personal revenge. Sean Connery's or even Pierce Brosnan's Bond would never put girl before country. But both *Casino* and *Quantum* fit into a larger trend of action films in which the hero is neither always right, nor always the best. He may not be American, but Hollywood's new Bond represents a new ideology within the action film: that maybe America is not always the savior.

Ideology in action films has been traced to the global political landscape for decades. During the Cold War, there was no question as to who led the free world, and action films in the 1980s epitomized this self-understanding. Films like *First Blood*, *Commando*, and *Die Hard* represented American foreign policy under Ronald Reagan, which repainted the world sphere in black-and-white following the chaotic '70s. In *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, before heading back into Cambodia, Rambo (Sylvester Stallone) asks his general: "Sir, do we get to win this time?" A question like that seems ridiculous to us now, but for many Americans, it represented the enduring power of the American spirit.

But since Sept. 11 and the failures of the Iraq War, Hollywood films have rejected the notion of the perfect action hero. A new hero was born with the *Bourne* trilogy, in which the title character has literally forgotten who he is—only to discover that he is a cold, hard killer. He no longer wishes to be one, but that won't stop the



James Bond (Daniel Craig) puts girl (Olga Kurylenko) before country in the modern action franchise.

CIA from attempting to track him down. The *Bourne* films represent a world in which an agent can't be perfected—he is, as we all are, flawed. The Daniel Craig Bond films follow a similar path. Maybe James Bond can't save his country, but, at the same time, does the world really need him to?

Other genres have taken similar cues. Set for release in December, the remake of Robert Wise's *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, starring Keanu Reeves, takes an interesting twist on the invasion genre. In the film, a dangerous alien visitor has come not to destroy us, but to save the Earth from destruction. The comic-book film genre has certainly changed during this millennium, but no upcoming comic book films look to be as dark and sinister as Zack Snyder's forthcoming adaptation of *Watchmen*, set for release in March. The film, based on the 1980s graphic novel by Alan Moore, takes place in an alternate universe where superheroes exist but have been banned by the government. It addresses the idea of the dying era of heroes and leaders: a revolutionary concept at the time of the graphic novel, but one that seems commonplace today.

Meanwhile, the rightist agenda has begun to assert itself in the realm of cinema. The past few years have seen several sequels to those 1980s franchises that are so rooted in black-and-white politics. While they are not necessarily about the

present day, each seems to carry a political message of longing for a return to vintage foreign policy. These include *Rambo*, the fourth film in the series, in which the titular killer heads to Burma to protect missionaries and singlehandedly wipes out an entire army. Interestingly enough, Stallone pledged his support for former Republican presidential candidate John McCain when the film was released in January of this year. And while McCain and Rambo share the same first name, John McClane from the *Die Hard* series comes even closer to the Arizona senator both nominally and politically. The summer of 2006 saw the release of the fourth film of the Bruce Willis action series, which set Detective McClane against cyber-terrorists. In the end, McClane falls back on shoot-'em-up tactics to save America. Even Steven Spielberg's release of *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* goes back to old-school politics by pitting the professor not against the Nazis, but the Soviet Union.

So now that the election has been decided and Barack Obama will take office in January, will we see more heroes like Jason Bourne or like John Rambo? Or will a new type emerge? Will audiences be shocked when heroes lay down their weapons and engage in diplomatic negotiations with the enemy instead? Only time will tell. ●

IDEOLOGY IN ACTION FILMS HAS BEEN TRACED TO THE GLOBAL POLITICAL LANDSCAPE FOR DECADES.



Aesthetic Aficionados

columbia's mfa program focuses on shaping the mind

PHOTO AND TEXT BY YIN YIN LU

Wow was all I could think as I stepped into Mira Dancy's studio last Saturday morning. So this is what it's like to be an MFA art student. This is what it's like to be an artist.

The room is white-walled and carpetless, over twice the size of a typical John Jay single, equipped with a ring of naked light bulbs on the ceiling, and with a three-paneled window overlooking a gas station on West 125th Street. It is filled—or rather overflowing—with art. Gigantic canvases saturated with explosions of contrasting hues hang from or are stacked against every wall; half-empty tubes of oil paint smother an entire table. It reflects every romanticized notion one might have of an artist's studio.

"I think the typical MFA student wakes up and goes with the flow of the day. And when inspiration strikes, he or she gets out his or her paintbrush or pencil," says Debbie Feng, CC '12. But how accurate are these notions, really? Surprisingly enough, they aren't too far from the truth. The Columbia MFA Visual Arts program is unlike any undergraduate art program—and even MFA art programs at some universities—in that it allows the students themselves to decide what they are going to create, largely on their own terms. There are a few required courses, but there are no homework assignments.

According to Gregory Amenoff, chair of the

Visual Arts Division, the primary function of the program is not to provide the degree itself (although this does allow teaching at a university level). Rather, it is "to strengthen the abilities of the artists ... to evaluate, consider, and conceptualize their vision, so they learn and develop a critical muscle with regards to their work at a higher level than they had before." Through critique from their peers and faculty, the students in the program are trained to think about what they are doing. As Amenoff states, "The program, like all MFA programs, is a very self-conscious one."

The program is also designed to cultivate a sense of community among its artists. "At least 50 percent of the intellectual exchange in the program is created and supported by the students themselves," says Amenoff. "This is not a top-down program ... it is horizontal."

The curriculum clearly aims to foster this kind of communication between students and faculty. In addition to a weekly 40-minute one-on-one meeting with a faculty member, students attend Critical Issues, a two-hour-long guest lecture or

THE COLUMBIA MFA VISUAL ARTS PROGRAM IS UNLIKE ANY UNDERGRADUATE ART PROGRAM—AND EVEN MFA ART PROGRAMS AT SOME UNIVERSITIES.

Is the life of an MFA student as romantic as this student's atelier? As it turns out, the answer is, more or less, yes.

group discussion, in which they discuss a larger theoretical issue related to art. This semester, students are investigating what role art can play in social change, especially in terms of art's relationship to capitalism.

Group Critique Workshop, a required MFA class that can sometimes last over six hours, is another communication-based endeavor. Eight to nine students and one professor visit four of the students' studios to discuss their artwork. Students themselves can determine the direction of the conversation, but, as Mira contends, "suggestions for improvement can be difficult [or even contentious] because they're really subjective."

It is clear that as ideal as the MFA Visual Arts program might sound, it is not without its flaws. The diversity of students in the program can foster fascinating discussions in classes such as the Group Critique Workshop, but it can also lead to misunderstandings. Mira explains, "Some people are already exhibiting their work ... some people are younger and just started," so there are "a lot of different expectations." The intensely time-consuming nature of the program can, according to Mira, also engender social tension because the students have to spend so much time together. Another problem with the program stems from scattered geography: Half of the student studios are on 125th Street, while the other half are on 115th Street with the faculty offices. This can sometimes hinder communication.

Because they are able to create their own schedules for their artwork, and because of the subjective nature of art, everything is evaluated on a pass/fail basis. "It's not about judgments, it's more about consideration," Amenoff says. The multidisciplinary nature of the program contributes greatly to these conversations and considerations. Although the 26 students in each class study a gamut of genres from painting to video art, there is no distinction between them: During the Group Critique Workshop, the students in each group are drawn from all genres. "I'm not interested in having conversations only with painters," Mira says. "If you're concerned about how the work that you're making interacts with a larger audience, you need to have more diverse input."

The MFA program may not be able to make you become an artist, but it does attempt to help you think, talk, and look at the world as the artist you'd like to become. In the words of Amenoff, "we might ultimately have personal ideas about that but that is the most simple-minded discussion. The more important discussion is 'is the work aligned with the personal vision or expectation of what the artist wants?'" ●

You can see second-year MFA students' artwork during Open Studios on Sunday, Nov. 23. Open Studios are held from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. on the second, third, and fifth floors of Watson Hall, 612 W. 115th St., and from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. on the second and third floors of Prentiss Hall, 632 W. 125th St. Mira's studio is located in Prentiss 209.

Gotta Get a Gimmick

ny theater's attempt to draw a younger demographic to the stage: part 2

BY JACQUI STOLZER

PHOTO COURTESY OF MATTERHORN

Last month, I went to channel my inner adolescent at 13, a new squeaky-clean musical with a score by Tony Award-winner Jason Robert Brown. But why cater to the braces-wearing crowd, I wondered, when it's parents and grandparents who decide how to spend the kids' extra cash?

One potential answer to this question is that producers are responding to an increasingly visible trend in the theater world. It is what Tommy Hill referred to, in the Oct. 24th edition of *The Eye*, as "the graying of American theater"—the decline in the attendance of young theater-goers. Just like Hill, I found myself to be the lone college-aged member of the audience—even 13, a show about first kisses and Bar Mitzvahs, just isn't drawing younger viewers.

When browsing the Web sites of several of Manhattan's more prominent off-Broadway theaters, it is clear that their marketing teams are working to remedy this situation. The sites' uses of language and tone suggest deliberate efforts to try to tap into the young person's psyche.

On the Vineyard Theatre's membership page, for instance, the headline boldly reads, "Theatre company seeks friends (with benefits)." Similarly, the Manhattan Theatre Club encourages people to sign up for their programs via Facebook, as if to say: "See? We're with it. We get how you people operate."

In addition to such gimmicks, theaters have also found newer and more substantial ways to attract a younger audience. While student-rush programs have become a staple, a new recruiting approach has emerged: the "under-30" subscription package.

While each theater offers slight variations, the basic formula remains the same: Offer a season package with fewer tickets and lower prices than those offered to more traditional subscribers. At Vineyard Theatre, an under-30 subscriber pays \$30 for the season, and can then buy \$15 tickets for any of the season's shows. At Playwrights Horizons, the deal materializes in the form of a FlexPass: Students can purchase packs of four or six tickets for \$40 or \$60, while non-students under

30 can purchase them for \$80 or \$120. And at the Manhattan Theatre Club, any ticket is \$30 for young patrons who join its 30 Under 30 Club. The goal is to turn sporadic student rush participants into more consistent patrons of the arts.

But ticket price is not the only obstacle to attracting a younger demographic. In offering such affordable tickets, theaters have found that young people's MIA status may have as much to do with their resistance to commitment and planning as with their wallets. Eric Winick of Playwright Horizons came to this understanding when he observed young people still flocking to the student-rush line, despite their option to purchase \$10 tickets in advance through the student FlexPass.

dent-rush tickets and an under-30 membership, they have also organized a "Spring Board"—a group of individuals under 30 who raise funds, organize events, and contribute input and ideas to the company.

"They meet regularly and have the ear of the executive director and me, as well as the director of development," Waller explains. "They can really get their hands dirty in some of the work of the theater."

New York Musical Theatre Festival boasts an similar program with its Young Producers Board. With their input in planning fund-raising events, NYMTF hopes to make the stage more accessible to a new generation of theater-goers.



Various theaters offer under-30 subscription packages, but their success seems to be limited among younger theater-goers.

"I THINK THAT THERE'S SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL BLOCK TO PUTTING DOWN \$40 OR \$60 UP FRONT."

"I think that there's some psychological block to putting down \$40 or \$60 up front," says Winick. "It sounds like a lot. But the fact of the matter is, you're going to come and do student rush and you're going to waste time and possibly be turned away or pay more."

Jonathan Waller, director of marketing at Vineyard Theatre, shares similar thoughts—in a city where options are limitless, young people don't want to be tied down to particular events or places. "I don't think \$30 is too much for them, but I think \$30 and the commitment is too much. I think that they will spend \$30 on a ticket, but I don't think they will spend \$30 and commit to a season of shows at the same theater," says Waller.

In response to this indifference, the theater has taken further initiative to foster loyalty among younger theater-goers. In addition to offering stu-

It seems as though the theater has provided options for people with all levels of interest and commitment. "Whether you are someone who wants to just see one show because you like that show, or someone who wants to commit to a season, or someone who wants to commit to the theater, we have something to offer," says Waller.

As I learn about these programs and listen to Winick and Waller's accounts, I can't help but feel a gnawing sense of guilt. They have made every effort to include my peers and me in New York's world-renowned theater community, and I have barely taken notice of the opportunities they have offered. It shouldn't be impossible for the under-30 crowd to grow roots in the theater, but the "poor college student," notoriously busy and refusing to live anywhere other than the here and now, seems particularly hard to please. ●

They've Come a Long Way Bab(ies)

guster's ryan miller on children and change

BY JENNIE ROSE HALPERIN
PHOTO BY CAROLINE MORT

In 1994, *Time* magazine ran a cover story called "The Strange World of the Internet." At the time, only 20 million people had access to the Internet, and most of them relied on newsgroups, IRC Chats, and e-mail.

One year later, the Boston-based band Guster set up a Web site that utilized this "strange world." Still college students themselves, their poppy folk sound appealed to kids who were already digging the jams of Phish and Dave Matthews Band. The three Tufts University students started touring constantly, using this new Internet phenomenon and relying on their energetic shows to draw in fans.

In an age where the Internet is the dominant form of discourse, touring is often undervalued as a marketing concept and moneymaker—but Guster comes from an earlier time. Often touring 250 days per year, the band is now taking six months off to spend time with their newborn children (three "Guster-girls" were born this year) and to record a new album. "We're not the first band to have children. You just have to tour smarter," says Ryan Miller, lead singer/songwriter and a founding member of Guster. "We were able to have a little flexibility, and we've never taken this much time off."

Miller's onstage persona, marked by clever banter, a charming eloquence, and oddly pitch-perfect performances in which his clear falsetto remains the sonic centerpiece, is reflected in his daily life. The new father is concerned not only with drawing new fans, but keeping the old ones. For him, the band has "been the entirety of my adult life. The fact that we're still excited about the music we're making, and it doesn't feel redundant, and we feel like our records change every time, that makes the difference with everything," he asserts.

Indeed, the band has made a smooth transition from its early sunny, acoustic sound to a series of albums that touch on both light and heavy themes, despite their jangly grace. For years, it was known to reviewers as "that band with the bongos," but it dropped much of the percussion and acoustic guitars after their third album. "Our 'signature sonic' went away," says Miller, "but we didn't care." At the same time, the band picked up a member, Joe Pisapia. "The Joe thing just happened in a very organic way. Originally, he was just going to play bass, and then he played everything," laughs Miller.

The band's versatility remains a trademark. "We all play everything now. It's just sort of a rotating stage. It keeps things interesting for

us, and it is more interesting musically," says Miller. Its variety extends beyond its sound. The band is legendary for its touring hijinks and close relationships with such musicians as Ben Kweller, Josh Rouse, and Ben Folds. "We certainly have a community. We've toured with the same bands over the years, and we've met a lot of new bands we love, and sometimes we love a band and they don't love us back," says Miller. Fans ate up stories about their favorite band through Guster's online tour diary, breaking down the often impenetrable barrier between artists and their fans.

They have maintained this close relationship since their inception, mostly through the brilliant rep system that has been key to Guster's success. It began when the band was still unsigned, with fans distributing the band's albums in exchange for EPs, T-shirts, and special access. Guster was quickly signed after the system's advent.

Though its listeners from 1994 have long since graduated, the majority of its fans are still college students. "By the time you get out of college, you have less time to spend finding new music," says Miller. "If I could just pick a fan base, I mean you want those sort of ... 15- to 24-year-olds cause those are the people who go to your shows and are the most voracious lovers of music, though it sometimes feels like they've been replaced by their younger brothers or sisters."

Founding member Adam Gardner's approach to gaining new fans draws on his grassroots experience in the band. (With his wife, he began an "eco-touring" company called Reverb that

is currently managing the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Jack Johnson, among others.) Even if the focus of the approach is simply Guster's getting songs played on the pop stations, its locus has definitely spread. "We have this mainstream aspect also—we've been working on a major label for almost 10 years and we're played on the radio, on certain stations. But we're not a household name, and we're still sort of this weird cult act," Miller says.

For this reason, the band does not shy away from using its music for commercial goals. Advertisements are "a great way to make money without feeling like you need to be on the bus nine months a year. It couldn't be an egregious offender of our core values, though. It's become a very acceptable thing to do within the indie world. We have to figure out a way to monetize what we do," says Miller.

As the band heads into the studio to record its fifth album, it is clear that while certain things have changed over the last 15 years, in the end, what matters most is having a solid, evolving sound that appeals to critics and fans alike. "We want to be in this band as long as it feels relevant and it doesn't feel like we're mining for some sort of weird nostalgia. It still feels important after all this time," says Miller.

With new members, new children, and new writing methods (the band wrote this album in short spurts, instead of throughout a tour), Guster proves it is possible to teach an old band new tricks. Or at least teach them to evolve with the times, wives and children in tow. ●



In terms of sound and the number of band members, Guster has changed dramatically over the years—but never for the worse.

Hat Attack

headwear makes a serious comeback

BY ALEXANDRA OWENS
PHOTO BY DAVE HOGAN

At the world premiere of the *Sex and the City* movie this summer, the film itself barely made headlines. Instead, everyone seemed to be talking about the hat that Sarah Jessica Parker was wearing on the red carpet: a green, garden-inspired Philip Treacy creation, complete with butterflies. Although it can't be said that hats ever really went out of fashion, it does seem that recent American generations have shown a new reluctance to sport them. Now, that all seems to be changing.

With designers like John Galliano sending hats down the runway, it seems millinery is making a comeback. In his Fall/Winter '08 show, Marc Jacobs featured stunning pastel tricorne, while Ralph Lauren was praised for his fresh leopard-print cocktail chapeaux with dramatic feather clusters. Linda Pagan, founder of The Hat Shop in SoHo, predicts that the trend is only going to gain momentum. "It's going to be massive!" she says. "Hats do well in recessions. Most people don't buy big ticket items, coats, etc. They spend on accessories."

That's not to say that these adornments can't be pricey. Barney's—a hat addict's mecca—stocks pieces that can exceed several hundred dollars in price. But the carefully selected collection of Eugenia Kim and Tracy Watts, including more unique confections, like a Victor Osborne splatter-paint wool turban, make the splurge seem well worth it. If you want a more intimate but equally luxurious hat-buying experience, The Hat Shop stocks everything from casual bucket hats to creations that look like they came straight from the racing scene in *My Fair Lady*. As an added perk, the shop will customize your hat's color, trim, and fit.

Luckily, the average hat is a more modest investment. Whether you choose Burberry Prorsum's exaggerated wool beanie, a Marc by Marc Jacobs beret, or a \$5.99 bowler from Forever 21, there's something for everyone in the market these days. Places to start are the boutiques Tutu and Alikat, as well as Screaming Mimi's for vintage. Don't overlook Urban Outfitters, which has a huge selection of hats, including an adorable black-and-white beret with an oversized bow by S Loves C.

This season, there are more varieties of hats than ever. However, the catwalk had a few clear winners.

The cloche and fedora are lasting favorites, but one trend that has emerged from designers such as Carolina Herrera for Fall/Winter '08 is feather or buckle detailing. Exaggerated beanies, slouchy berets, and floppy, wide-brimmed hats in muted tones also appeared in collections and offer newer, interesting shapes.

High- or low-end, classic or modern, it's helpful to keep some rules in mind when out hat-hunting. Any hat enthusiast will tell you that face shape is everything. If you have a long face, Pagan suggests that you make sure your hat has a brim. Heart-shaped faces are complimented by medium brims, round faces by asymmetrical brims, and square faces by round crowns. If your face is oval-shaped, you're in luck—anything goes.

Finding headwear that suits both your features and personality is key. Pagan advises, "The hat must fit comfortably and you must feel confident wearing it, if you are not confident try a less flashy style." And, as with any accessory, how you wear it is just as important as the item itself. Philip Treacy's avant-garde looks might only work on Sarah Jessica, but you shouldn't hesitate to sport your felt cloche with just as much poise and energy. ●



Not everybody can pull off headwear as this dramatic piece by Philip Treacy, but Sarah Jessica Parker makes it work.



Person of the Week: The Obamas

BY SHIRLEY CHEN
PHOTO COURTESY OF STYLE SPY

Emotions were raw on election night. Students cried, strangers rallied together, and the security guard in Butler Library simply nodded and brought out his secret cigar stash. The energy of change was addictive and everyone glowed—but no one more than the man of the hour, Barack Obama, the 44th president of the United States of America. What won the election? The political pundits will forever disagree, but as the nation celebrated the dawn of a new presidential era, one thing was certain—the fashion gods were smiling.

Barack is young, athletic, and remarkably attractive for a man in his position. His wife and, in his own words, his "rock," tour de force Michelle Obama, is elegant, stylish, and intelligent. Together, they form a dream team reminiscent of another golden Oval Office couple, the Kennedys.

Yet the Obamas are not all about glamour and Camelot—they have been careful about their image and presentation. Michelle wears contemporary American designers in bold colors with oversized heirloom pearls. Chic sheaths from Maria Pinto, Thakoon Panichgul, Narciso Rodriguez, and Donna Ricco are mixed with affordable items from The Gap and J. Crew. She is stylistically classic, but approachable. Compared with Cindy McCain's \$300,000 outfits consisting of Oscar de la Renta suits and Chanel couture, or Sarah Palin's \$150,000 budget for Valentino and makeup sessions, Michelle's outfits stand out in all the right ways.

There is something patriotic about Michelle's style, her insistence on wearing American designers, and her choosing outfits that are not just for decoration. While polished, her clothes are still practical; you believe she can work—and perhaps even change the world—in them. Michelle is this generation's first lady, an improved version of Jackie, with brains and strength to fit our modern lifestyle. And Barack Obama's style seems to take cues from his wife's. His slim fit, custom-made suits are from his hometown Chicago designer, Hart Schaffner Marx. Barack also represents a change from what has been the norm, and many Americans feel that he will be the change they've been hoping for. Good luck, Mr. President—the nation is watching, and waiting. \\\

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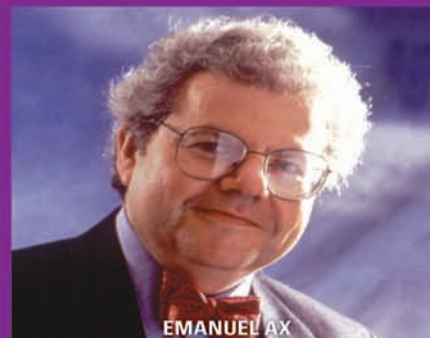
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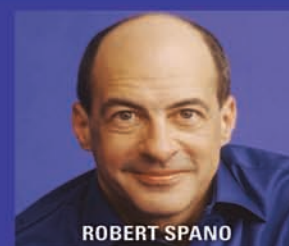
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